

## Lessons Learned by the ESA Division of Child Support (DCS): *The WSQA Assessment Experience*

DCS submitted its application for permission to apply to WSQA for the shorter assessment (20 page document) in February 2006. After eleven months of work, DCS submitted the assessment document to WSQA for examination on December 27, 2006. DCS received the WSQA Feedback Report March 30, 2007 and the Leadership Team received a personal debrief on April 19, 2007 from the examiners. To view a copy of the DCS application and feedback report, go to:

<http://www.accountability.wa.gov/resources/quality/examples.asp>

### LOGISTICS LESSONS

Topic Area	Considerations and Lessons Learned
<b>LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT &amp; INVOLVEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visible leadership commitment to the process and an attitude of openness to learning and growth are critical.</li> <li>Leadership support of the dedicated, focused time to investigate, debate, write, edit, and rewrite is important.</li> <li>Leadership participation and investment was partly obtained via a few short brainstorming sessions to flesh out answers to some WSQA questions.</li> </ul>
<b>TRAINING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take the one-day WSQA class "How to write a WSQA Application." It will help trigger creative thinking and help you organize the writing process.</li> <li>All writing team members should have training together to have a common vision and understanding of writing the application and what is important to include.</li> <li>Order Baldrige booklets to help leaders and writing team members understand the components of the examination and assessment standards used by WSQA. Go through these materials together as a writing team to have common understanding.</li> </ul>
<b>TEAM APPROACH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It takes a village! DCS started off with one person as the main writer, fitting it in as able between normal duties. That approach was not viable.</li> <li>Divide work with writing pairs for each section – both a primary writer and editor.</li> <li>Staff the team with organizational experts of diverse perspectives, WSQA experts (examiners), those who enjoy research, and excellent writers. Varied perspectives and talents on the team made for a better product.</li> <li>Obtain common voice and flow for the document as a whole at the very end with one primary editing pair.</li> <li>A lead project manager with good project management skills will help keep things on pace and coordinated.</li> </ul>
<b>WRITING STYLE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be concise and focused. Space limitations are severe, so ensure you maximize space by directly answering the questions asked.</li> <li>The quality of writing is at least as important as the institutional knowledge.</li> <li>You must communicate complex concepts in very limited space.</li> <li>The end product will be very dense.</li> <li>Utilize tables and charts wherever possible to conserve space.</li> <li>Find someone who is good at table and graphic design to be part of the team.</li> </ul>
<b>DATA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charts showing historical data trends and comparative data are critical.</li> <li>Section 7 (Key Results) is weighted in the scoring significantly higher, so focus attention early to collect good data and build charts.</li> <li>Coordinate your application due date with a time when your year-end comparable data will be available.</li> </ul>

## LOGISTICS LESSONS

Topic Area	Considerations and Lessons Learned
<b>EDITING &amp; REVIEW</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expect multiple rounds of editing and re-writing – keep going so long as everyone agrees each round of revisions results in a stronger product.</li> <li>Perfection is nice but learn to let go and move on at a certain point.</li> <li>Agree early as a team on writing conventions and plain talk rules.</li> <li>Don't become personally invested in the writing style and content. Open group discussions and reviews by executive leaders often lead to better quality.</li> <li>Step away from the writing for a few days and do something else. When you come back with fresh eyes, you see things you overlooked.</li> </ul>
<b>TIME INVESTMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCS invested approximately 800 total hours to prepare its assessment document. This includes training, brainstorming sessions, investigating, interviewing, individual and group writing sessions, review and edit time.</li> <li>Ensure all team members understand the necessary time commitment ahead of time – it will be more than just a few-hour writing and editing process.</li> <li>The final product took much longer than anticipated, but evolved into a much better product following each round of reviews and rewrites.</li> <li>Dedicated blocks of time are necessary. It cannot simply be woven into other duties during a day. Periodic 6-hour meetings held with the entire team present were very helpful. 6 hours is about all a group can focus on this.</li> <li>WSQA requires each applicant to offer up one person to become an examiner. This is a significant investment. The person qualifies to be an examiner and subsequently conducts exams of other organizations.</li> </ul>

## Organizational Lessons (Opportunities for Improvement – “OFIs”)--

Topic Area	Considerations and Lessons Learned
<b>PERSONAL GROWTH &amp; DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the writing team can expect to find newfound appreciation for the skills and talents of others on the team and in the organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“This has been a wonderful learning opportunity for me—learning more about the organization I work for (even after 13 years)...and the hard working and talented people I work with.”</li> <li>“You will be transformed and uplifted by qualities of others you never saw before. Be prepared to learn something about yourself too.”</li> <li>“I didn't know she did that. That's incredible!”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>DATA MANAGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While we have systems for gathering core child support data, similar transparent and historical trend data in the area of human resources, budget, and customer satisfaction is weak.</li> <li>How we measure and track some of the key goals contained in our mission &amp; vision like “improving the lives of children” and treating customers with “dignity and respect” is difficult to pinpoint.</li> <li>What measures and systems do we have in place to ensure ethical behavior? We believe we are focused on ensuring ethical behavior, but how do we measure that?</li> </ul>
<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCS has experienced a wide variety of strategic planning methods in the past. While the results may be satisfactory, the systems by which this is accomplished and communicated probably could be improved.</li> </ul>
<b>MISC.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submitting the application to WSQA is only the beginning.</li> <li>Celebrate milestones, but recognize the work ahead by analyzing OFIs both from the WSQA Examiner and gaps identified by the core writing team.</li> <li>When examining OFIs, don't just look to fix the particular symptom, look to find underlying root causes, then establish systems that address the root cause.</li> </ul>